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### MIDEAST TURMOIL: PALESTINIAN; Suicide Planner Expresses Joy Over His Missions

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The slight, bearded Palestinian prisoner, dressed in a tan shirt and sweat pants, spoke evenly about how he had sent suicidal attackers to kill Israelis, recalling his satisfaction when their missions were accomplished.

The prisoner, Abdel Karim Aweis, 31, a leader of Al Aksa Martyrs Brigades, a militant group linked to Yasir Arafat's Fatah movement, said he had wanted to even the score after growing numbers of Palestinians were killed by Israeli troops in months of intensifying violence. The goal of his group, he asserted, was to increase losses in Israel to a point at which the Israeli public would demand a withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza Strip -- an aim he acknowledged has not been achieved.

The interview with Mr. Aweis was offered by the Israeli authorities. It was arranged with the cooperation of the Shin Bet security service, the Israeli agency that interrogated him after he was captured in Ramallah during the recent Israeli military sweep of the West Bank.

An interrogator was present during the interview, but Mr. Aweis seemed at ease, roaming freely between the operational details and ideological motives of his activities.

When the interrogator left the room, Mr. Aweis said he had been denied sleep for the first 24 hours of his captivity and had his hands tied behind him. After that, he said, he was allowed to sleep between interrogations and was not beaten or otherwise mistreated.

In the interview, Mr. Aweis described attacks organized at a local level, often in revenge for Israeli killings of suspected Palestinian militants, by volunteers who had let it be known that they were prepared to carry out suicide bombings or shootings.

His own role illustrated the complex relationship between Fatah's armed militants and the security forces of the Palestinian Authority. Mr. Aweis was an officer in the General Intelligence branch of the Palestinian police, and he was briefly detained by the same force after two deadly attacks that he helped organize in his role as a militant.

Born and raised in the Jenin refugee camp, he was jailed for eight months after participating in stone-throwing protests during the first Palestinian uprising in the late 1980's. He was later hospitalized with bullet wounds sustained in clashes with Israeli soldiers.

In 1990, as a leader of the Black Panther, a militant group affiliated with Fatah, he stabbed to death a suspected informer for Israel and was sentenced to life in prison. He was released in 1994 as part of the Oslo accords between Israel and the Palestinians. Later, along with many other former prisoners from Fatah, he joined the Palestinian police force in the West Bank.

Like other Fatah members, Mr. Aweis said, he was committed to the accords with Israel, and as an officer in General Intelligence he participated in arrests of Muslim militants.

But as the Oslo accords unraveled and the current Palestinian uprising began in September 2000, Mr. Aweis went from disenchantment to violence. He attributed the uprising to feelings among Palestinians that the self-rule accords had achieved little aside from the constriction of Palestinians in isolated enclaves, with no signs of movement toward statehood. "There were only roadblocks, no freedom," he said.

When the uprising began, he said, he took part in marches and demonstrations, but as street clashes escalated and one friend after another was killed by Israeli gunfire, he became convinced that their deaths could be met only with similar deadly violence.

"A stone is no match for an M-16 rifle or a tank shell," he said. "We wanted to change the balance of power in a way that would affect the Israelis, and close the gap between us and the Israeli Army."

He joined Al Aksa Brigades, organizing shooting attacks on Israeli settlers driving West Bank roads. But as Israel responded with targeted killings of suspected militants, and Palestinian civilian deaths continued to mount in intensifying clashes, members of the brigades turned to planning suicide attacks inside Israel and have claimed responsibility for some of the deadliest attacks this year.

"The indiscriminate killing of Palestinian women and children led people to think about martyrdom operations inside Israel that would have an impact on the Israeli public," Mr. Aweis said. "We would respond by killing more people, pressuring the Israelis to take to the streets to demand a withdrawal" from the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Mr. Aweis said he personally supervised the dispatch of two Palestinian gunmen from Jenin who killed 2 people and wounded 10 others in the neighboring Israeli town of Afula on Nov. 27.

The attack, Mr. Aweis said, was in retaliation for the killing of two militants from the Jenin camp in a car explosion a few weeks earlier. He said he arranged the attack with a personal acquaintance, Ali Safuri, a local leader of the militant Islamic Jihad group. The two gunmen used a stolen Israeli car and dirt roads to circumvent Israeli checkpoints, and Mr. Aweis wrote their farewell messages, videotaped before they set out.

"They were smiling, they had decided on martyrdom," Mr. Aweis said, recalling their send-off. "I told them, 'Be strong, be men.'"

When he heard news of the attack he was pleased, he said, because "it was an appropriate reply to the assassination" of his friends.

Afterward, Mr. Aweis was taken into Palestinian police custody in Jenin for 20 days, then transferred to Ramallah, where he was held for 12 more days. He was released in exchange for a promise that he would not resume his violent activities, he said.

The promise was soon broken.

In February, according to an interrogation report, Mr. Aweis prepared a young woman for a suicide bombing mission. She blew herself up at an Israeli roadblock when she was stopped for an identity check as she tried to cross into Israel. Three Israeli policemen were wounded.

Mr. Aweis said he later approved the dispatch of another suicide bomber, for an attack that killed 3 Israelis and wounded 40 others on March 21 in downtown Jerusalem. Mr. Aweis said he had authorized the bombing to avenge the death of his brother and another militant 12 days earlier.

He said he had seen the bomber wearing an explosives belt before he left on his mission.

"I asked him where he was going, and he said, 'To Paradise,' " Mr. Aweis said. "He was not afraid.

"People are walking to their deaths with their own two feet. Without freedom, this is not a life."

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